

Psychotherapy Associates



CENTER FOR FAMILY RELATIONS

821

February 8, 2009

Re: SB 821 "An Act Concerning Marital and Family Therapists"

To the Members of the Insurance Committee:

I am writing you about SB 821 "An Act Concerning Marital and Family Therapists" in which you are proposing legislation that would prohibit state licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFTs) from accessing insurance company reimbursement for their mental health services.

Stated quite simply, passage of this bill *will precipitate a mental health care crisis* in our state the costs of which will far exceed by comparison any expected health insurance cost savings.

Please consider the following:

My wife and I both are LMFTs. We operate a busy, moderate-sized private psychotherapy practice in Woodbury, CT. Conservatively, I would estimate that we have roughly 200 active clients at any given time. These include individuals and families. If we were unable to offer our services as in-network providers for the major insurance companies, in the stroke of a pen we would lose 95% of our business. Passage of such a bill would be catastrophic for us, personally, and unnecessarily restrictive for those consumers who have paid for, and would wish to access, insurance policies that cover the cost of our specific services.

Now consider that there are roughly 1,000 LMFTs working in the state of Connecticut. The math suggests that your bill would make it that much more restrictive for anywhere between 100,000 to 200,000 individuals or families to get the mental health care services they (usually so urgently) need. I am unable to calculate the added cost burden to state government or private industry but it would be considerable in terms of added pressure on state mental health facilities and in terms of absenteeism and lost productivity in the private sector.

Not all mental health practitioners are trained in the same way. The theoretical underpinnings of MFT academic and clinical training are unique in the mental health profession, which is exactly why LMFTs should *not* be disqualified from continued participation in insurance reimbursement. Marriage and family therapists are the only mental health providers who are trained to understand psychiatric problems from what is called a "systems" perspective. It is because of such training that LMFTs are able to effect change in clients that not only will be more likely to endure, over time, but that can be accomplished relatively quickly compared to other, more intensive psychiatric disciplines. What this translates into is "*more change at less cost.*"

This is important to understand because LMFTs generally focus on specific problems relating to the way in which individuals or entire family systems operate, for better or for worse. We do not work on mental health problems psychodynamically (that is, by doing insight-oriented therapy over the course of what sometimes can be years and years). The work of an LMFT is usually shorter in duration and more focused on changing that which doesn't work. The net result has proven itself through studies to yield better clinical outcomes accomplished over a shorter period of time where positive change is more likely to remain in-place. Again, *more change at less cost.*

Ironically, ours should be the mental health profession of choice if the desire (as it should be) is to move treatment along in a targeted, purposeful, clinically appropriate and cost-effective manner. In one important respect, our profession is on the same side of the argument as you are. As a matter of professional ethics, we do not prolong treatment unnecessarily and, because of that, our services help to keep mental health care costs in-line and philosophically in-step with the times.

I respectfully urge that you do not pursue this bill any further. If you consider all of the above, I am hopeful that you will appreciate how "solving" one problem will create another problem of far greater import and destructive potential. The unintended consequences of this legislation are too huge and too unknown. Passage of your bill will immediately put 1,000 highly-trained people out of work and will leave approximately 200,000 of our state's families out of luck. Please do not do this to the workers and citizens of our state.

Very respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Sharp", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert A. Sharp, MA, LMFT
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